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management plan

beartooth recreation area

Montana Department of Fish & Game
Recreation & Parks Division

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MANAGEMENT PLAN

BEARTOOTH STATE RECREATION AREA

HOLTER LAKE

JANUARY 1977

RECREATION AND PARKS DIVISION

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

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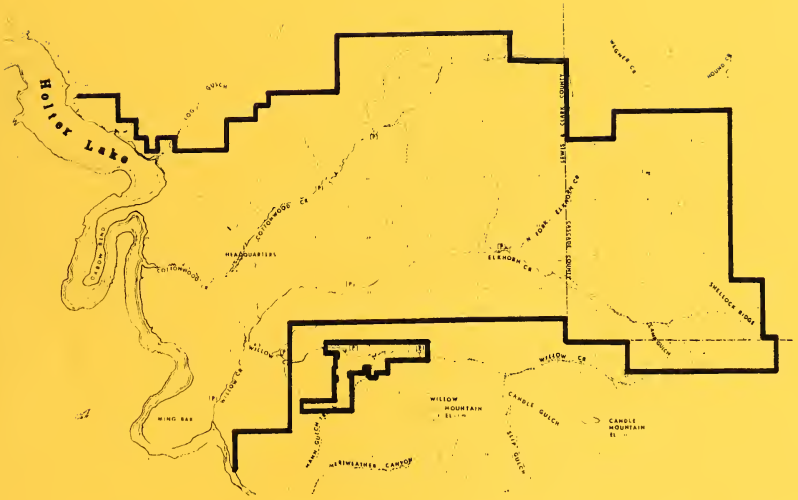
PREFACE

The main objective of this planning effort is to determine what the long range management direction will be for the Beartooth State Recreation Area. To define this direction, a management plan is desired that will provide the best mix of land use benefits to satisfy existing and projected land use demands. Defining what is best, however, is not an easy task. Conflicting and rising demands are increasing for the fixed number of acres available as well as the use benefits which the acres can provide.



BEARTOOTH

RECREATION & GAME MANAGEMENT AREA

sheet 1 of 8

INTRODUCTION

In 1970 the Fish and Game Department purchased the Beartooth Game Range, an area containing approximately 32,318 acres of deeded and leased lands. The purchase was made possible by funds available under the Pittman-Robertson Act. The game range includes land on the east shore of Holter Lake and makes several miles of lakeshore frontage available for public use. Although the main objective of the purchase was to provide winter game range, the intent of this project is to install the necessary facilities to make several locations along the lake frontage available for use by the public.

The Beartooth Recreation Area is comprised of three developed sites located at Juniper Bay, Log Gulch and Departure Point. There are several summer homes below the county road that leads to the recreation sites. There are a few dwellings on the west side of the river below the Montana Power dam which creates Holter Lake. These house the employees of the Montana Power Company. There are no other dwellings within the immediate area of the recreation sites. Wolf Creek, with a population of 100, is the nearest community. It is adjacent to Interstate 15, approximately ten miles from the recreation areas. Holter Lake has long been a popular fishing and boating area for residents of Helena and Great Falls.

The top of the spillway at Holter Dam is at elevation 3548. The reservoir is operated at a fairly stable elevation and ordinarily fluctuates between elevations 3560 and 3564. The recreation areas are all located adjacent to the reservoir.

From the lakeshore the land rises rather abruptly to elevations in excess of 5000 feet. From these higher elevations there are two drainages, Juniper Bay and Log Gulch, that empty into the reservoir.

GENERAL RECREATION POLICY

The state legislature has passed several acts giving the Fish and Game Commission the authority to acquire, plan and develop outdoor recreational resources in the state and the responsibility of conserving archaeologic, scientific and recreational resources of the state for their use and enjoyment, thereby contributing to the cultural, recreational and economic life of the people and their health.

The ultimate goal concerning recreation is that the State of Montana is to provide for the appropriate recreational use of its natural resources, consistent with the capability of the resource to supply such use and with the obligation to preserve these resources for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations. The general recreation policies for the State of Montana are as follows:

1) To provide and maintain access to public lands.

2) To acquire land for public access and guarantee its availability for recreation.

3) To ensure recreational opportunity to Montana residents and visitors.

4) To provide facilities for a balanced array of activities as well as to protect undeveloped areas against over-capacity recreational activity.

5) To give adequate attention to and facilitate the needs of the day user as well as the camper.

6) To give consideration to year-around recreational needs, accomodating winter activities as well.

7) To provide for all outdoor activities not just those most popular.

8) To provide acreas of sufficient size and diversity so as to enable the recreationist to devise his or her own recreational experience.

9) To give adequate protection to the environment while fulfilling the needs of the recreationist.

10) To develop positive programs for activities that might otherwise create special problems, such as snowmobiling and all-terrain vehicles.

11) To provide that a share of the recreational opportunity is within reasonable travel distance of population centers.

12) To provide recreation with respect to the density and distribution of population.

13) To maintain the health and safety of the public while using recreation areas.

PURPOSE OF PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Water-oriented recreation is high on the list of preferred types of activity in Montana; however, lakes, reservoirs, rivers and streams are of limited availability and because of high land values, are hard to obtain. Once land adjacent to water is open to the public, intense recreational use occurs.

This situation presents itself at sites comprising the Beartooth State Recreation Area. The trend in seeking recreation at the present time is to travel less miles, but spend longer periods of time at recreation areas. The Holter Lake area provides a limited opportunity for leisure time activities such as boating, camping, picnicking, fishing, swimming and other similar pursuits. However, problems of handling the increased recreationists with limited facilities have occurred and demand for traditional activities change.

Perhaps no single technological advance has had a more pronounced effect on the use of outdoor recreation facilities than the improvements in the characteristics and performance of recreational vehicles including camper-trailer units and motorized vans.

The impact of these vehicle types has been felt in the Beartooth State Recreation Area. This impact has caused a change from designated use at these three sites resulting in higher development levels of use. This may enhance the recreational experience for socially oriented users, but detracts from the quality of the experience for others.

The growing demand for such mechanized equipment has raised serious problems of environmental quality in the Beartooth State Recreation Area. Motor boats, trail bikes, pickup campers and motorized vans have increased pressure on campsite environments and impact adjacent wildlife habitat. There is, therefore, a need to develop plans and policies to cope with these increased demands.

The expectations of recreationists using the Beartooth State Recreation Area about satisfactions achieved in outdoor recreation are important determinants of what activities they pursue, where they go and when. It is difficult to determine with any fine degree of precision whether these expectations are being fulfilled.

Many of these conflicts of use as well as these seemingly contradictions of public attitude are perhaps less confusing when viewed in the light of increasing demands for limited resources.

Management objectives, therefore, must be defined to include:

1. Provide recreation for a maximum number of people within the limits of the recreation area.

2. Provide the highest quality recreation experience possible.

3. Protect the recreation area environment from degradation by people, vehicles and incompatible use.

4. Separate the developed recreation sites from the game range and educate people as to the reasons for this separation.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE AREA

The values for which recreation sites have been set aside should not be destroyed by an overuse for intensive outdoor recreation purposes. The problem of deterioration of both the environment and the recreation experience due to overcrowding has reached crisis proportions in the Beartooth Recreation Area. Current attempts to reduce use pressures by adopting a regulation of recreation use have not coincided with the demands of many of the recreationists using this area.

Major problems have evolved including:

1. Recreationists using the area primarily for fishing have been parking camper-trailer units in designated parking area for extended overnight stays.

2. Vehicular traffic approaching the Beartooth Recreation Area from Wolf Creek have become confused by the existing signing or lack of signing, indicating available campsites, etc. In general the signs are not consistent in size, shape or color and in some cases are obsolete.

3. The existing county road from Wolf Creek to the Beartooth Ranch follows a course near the shoreline of Holter Lake. This is a high-use fishing area and circulation patterns for controlled use are limited due to topography of the area.

4. No transition area exists between the recreation area and the game management area. Signing is inadequate at the present time and most people are unaware of when they leave the recreation area and enter the game management area; thus a conflict of use exists resulting in exceeding the limit of acceptable change to social camping capacity as well as the ecological carrying capacity.

Development of the area along Holter Lake Reservoir for intensive recreational use has attracted more people than can be accomodated. Some of the people who cannot be accomodated in the developed areas move onto the game range to camp. This results in the potential problem of water oriented recreation interferring with wildlife management on the game range.

5. Campers have been cutting green wood within the game range for use as firewood. This illegal wood cutting appears to have increased as visitor use has increased.

6. A problem indirectly related to our recreation sites is parking space for cars and boat trailers belonging to people owning cabins across the reservoir. Our newly enlarged parking lot at Log Gulch will surely invite increased use of our facilities by these people.

There are several alternatives which can be considered in dealing with these problems:

1. Alternate one -- arbitrarily adopt a "no-development" policy for available recreational sites.

2. Alternate two -- make every effort to accelerate recreational development by granting each and every demand for use.

3. Alternate three -- combine several scenarios of pollution, environmental disruption and natural beauty to present a balanced use, understanding that land is the limiting factor.

A "no-development" policy as outlined in Alternate One would result in uncontrolled public use of the area and increase deterioration of vegetation and disruption of wild life habitat. Public safety and health would not be considered.

Alternate Two would result in exceeding the carrying capacity of the available recreation sites in an area close to a high population center such as Great Falls. Water-oriented recreation demands could expand into the Game Range. The original intended use of the Range for Wildlife management would then be violated.

The uncertainty raised under Alternative Three lies in accurately determining what is balanced and what is unbalanced; therefore, management decisions relative to designated use of this area must be regulated based on the majority of use consensus; but at the same time, keeping in mind the original intended use of the overall resource.

Balanced use, therefore, must keep in mind the following objectives: 1.) Provide recreation for a maximum number of people within the limits of the recreation area; 2.) Provide the highest quality recreation experience possible; 3.) Protect the recreation area environment from degradation by people, vehicles or other compatible use; 4.) Separate the developed recreation area from the game range and educate people as to the reasons for this separation.

Management decisions relative to short and long range planning efforts in the Beartooth State Recreation Area must take into consideration the following:

1. What are the use demands and what effect will such decisions, relative to the recreation area, have on the game range?

2. Exactly what changes are occurring?

3. Are these changes intolerable or unacceptable? (Limitation of land area being a major factor.)

4. How far can we go before we can no longer tolerate further change?

Use demands at Juniper Bay, Log Gulch and Departure Point consist primarily of fishing and boating oriented activities. This has resulted in camper-pickups and mobile vans along with boat trailers being parked overnight in designated day use parking areas. This situation has been extremely difficult to correct based on current designated uses because of the demand for overnight camping of these vehicles in these areas. As a result many of these motorized vehicles will travel south and park overnight in the game range area, creating problems for the management of wildlife. This has resulted in vehicles using undesignated areas in the woodland for such parking and camping.

In addition, many vehicles will park on the side of the road in undesignated off-road areas creating soil erosion problems as well as traffic problems.

The quality of recreation experience is an individual judgment. As the managing agency, our measure of quality must come from the users. Therefore, we should survey the attitudes of recreationists who use the Beartooth and we must be aware of public opinions of our management of the area. This can be accomplished on a trial basis through our caretaker as he contacts individuals in his daily routine. The numbers of people who use the developed areas are also a good measure of user satisfaction. Problems with regard to the quality of experience will have to be dealt with individually.

Surveillance of the area in general, taking note of the condition of the environment, should be part of the daily management routine and should provide the information necessary to respond to the needs of the environment.

In addition, an educational program should be developed. This should include pamphlets and possibly a slide illustrated talk to educate people as to the characteristics of the area and its management.

These changes and impacts are a direct result of the increased use of motorized recreational vehicles including camper-trailer units and vans. This has been compounded by a limitation of available land due to the topography of the area.

MANAGEMENT OF THE RESOURCE

The Beartooth State Recreation Area is located approximately 45 miles north of Helena. Access to the site is via Interstate Highway 15 to Wolf Creek and then by county road to the area.

Three sites along the county road have been constructed as recreation sites. They have been named Juniper Bay, Log Gulch, and Departure Point. These facilities include picnic tables, fireplaces, latrines and garbage containers, a well, boat ramp and necessary access roads and parking areas.

Recreational developments in the Beartooth State Recreation Area must be planned for the specific purpose to be served. The past tendency to standardize development in all areas will not provide for the wide range of desires of the public. The historic concept of providing limited localities such as "public access" by building a road, parking and boat launching ramp, will often create more problems than it solves.

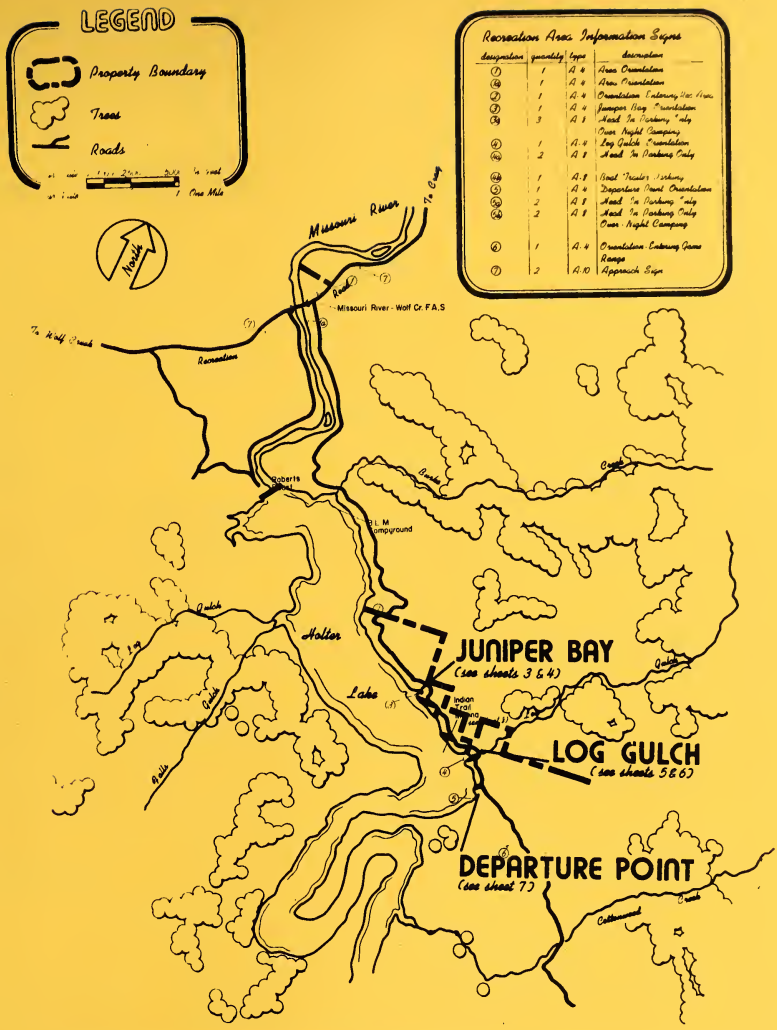
The principle users of the recreation sites in the Beartooth State Recreation Area are fishermen, tourists and the activity, oriented recreationist. Holter Lake is a major water resource and attracts recreationists from far ranging localities. As boating and fishing are among the most popular activities in the area, one of the principal elements of this plan will be the inclusions of accessibility for fishermen as well as informational signing to assure that recreationists do not become confused as to parking regulations, as well as traffic circulation patterns, etc.

Due to the limited access to the lake as well as the danger of excess intrusion into the game management area, a large scale State Park Development Area has been discounted as a feasible means of satisfying public needs.

A change in designated use in some areas along with controlled circulation patterns may help alleviate some of these problems. Therefore, the following is proposed:

A. An information area will be constructed at the intersection of the Canyon Recreation Road and the county road, on the northeast side of the Missouri River, allowing recreationists to become familiar with the locations and limitations of all recreational facilites located on the county road running along the northeast shoreline of Holter Lake. This area will be located either within the county right-of-way or preferably in an area which hopefully can be acquired from private property holdings (see map). The purpose of this information area is to acquaint people with situations which prevail prior to having recreationists commiting themselves to traversing the area when all areas are filled. The information will cover the overall general area.

B. An orientation site will be established at the entrance to the Beartooth State Recreation Area to acquaint recreationists with specific sites and regulations within the Beartooth State Recreation Area and the Beartooth Game Range. This area will also contain sufficient room for turn-arounds by vehicles trailing camper trailers and/or boats.


LEGEND
Property Boundary
Trees
Roads
One Mile
North
Recreation Area Information Signs
designation
quantity
type
description
Area Orientation
Area Orientation
Orientation Entrance Use Area
Ranger Ring Orientation
Missouri River
To Camp
Road
Missouri River - Wolf Cr. F.A.S
To Wolf Creek
Recreation
Roberts Bridge
B.L.M. Campground
Creek
Gulch
Holter
Lake
JUNIPER BAY
(see sheets 3 & 4)
Indian Point Campground
LOG GULCH
(see sheets 5 & 6)
DEPARTURE POINT
(see sheet 7)
Cottonwood
BEARTOOTH
RECREATION AREA

Sheet 2 of 8

C. An orientation area will also be established at the entrance to the Beartooth Game RAnge to make recreationists aware of the regulations governing this particular area. A Turn-around for vehicles trailing camper trailers and/or boats will also be provided.

D. Specific site signing will be installed at Juniper Bay, Log Gulch and Departure Point to help regulate use, parking configurations, etc. (See maps of specific sites.)

E. Specific site improvements will be constructed as follows:

1. Juniper Bay

a. Signed to indicate regulations, fees and designated use areas (area orientation).

b. Allow overnight camping (post) with limited stay.

c. Designate head-in parking.

d. Allow boat launching but do not post.

e. Allow camping along creek (entrance near sta. 0+00 Base Line No. 3).

2. Log Gulch

a. Signed to indicate regulations, fees and designated use areas (area orientation).

b. Allow overnight camping (post) in boat trailer parking areas designated.

c. Designate head-in parking by use of log barriers or railroad ties.

d. Allow camping (overflow) along small gulch area southeast of the creek.

3. Departure Point

a. Signed to indicate regulations, fees and designated use areas (area orientation).

b. Allow overnight camping at upper level only (post).

c. Discourage boat launching and boat trailer parking by posting regulation signs.

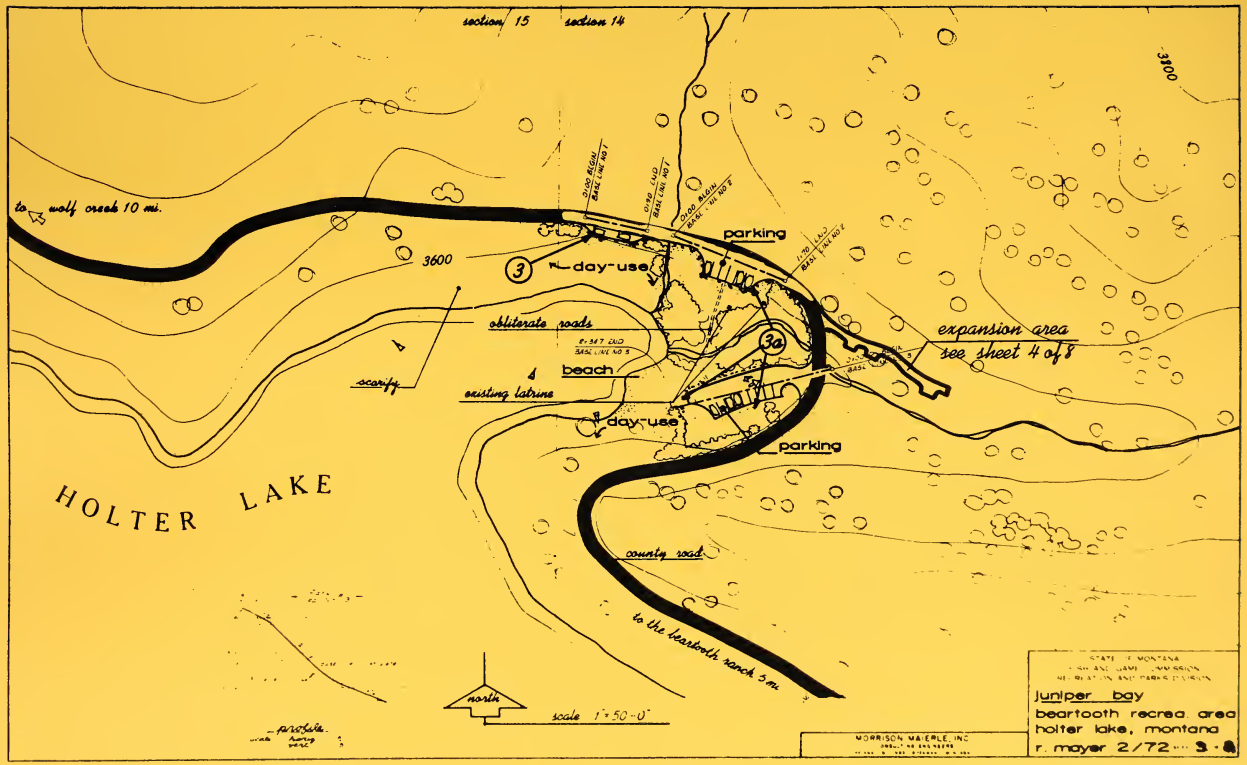
4. Firewood Concessions

Illegal wood cutting for firewood is a perpetual problem. It is recommended that the possibility of a concessionaire be obtained to dispense firewood to campers using this area. This would assure firewood availability and may discourage such illegal cutting.

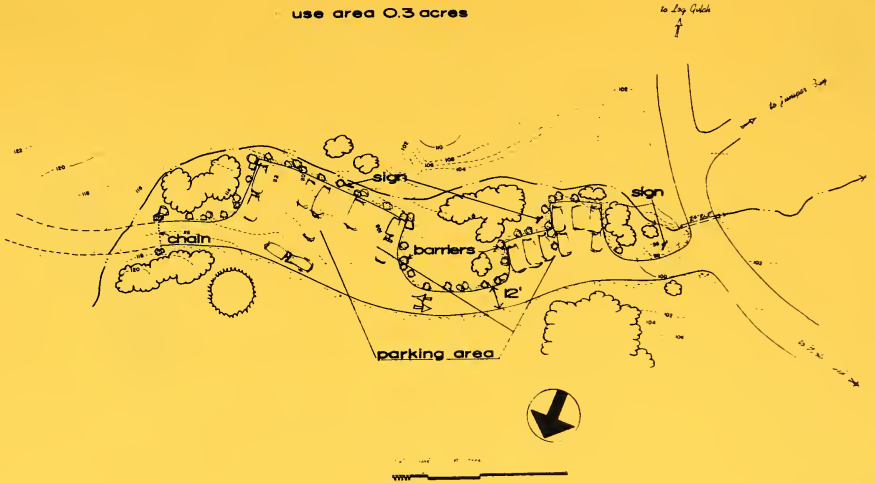
5. Indian Trail Marina

The public is currently utilizing land across the road from the marina for parking vehicles and boat trailers. This land is owned by the Department of Fish and Game and every year increased encroachment results from such use.

Rather than eliminate such use completely, it is recommended that such use be allowed, but regulated into designated areas only. The cost of providing such areas would be borne by the owner of the marina under a concession agreement with the Department of Fish and Game.


section 15
section 14
3100
to wolf creek 10 mi.
3600
parking
3
day-use
obliterate roads
scarify
beach
existing latrine
3a
day-use
parking
expansion area
see sheet 4 of 8
HOLTER LAKE
county road
to the beartooth ranch 5 mi.
north
scale 1"=50'-0"
MORRISON MAIERLE, INC
STATE OF MONTANA
juniper bay
beartooth recrea. area
holter lake, montana
r. mayer 2/72
S-8

use area 0.3 acres

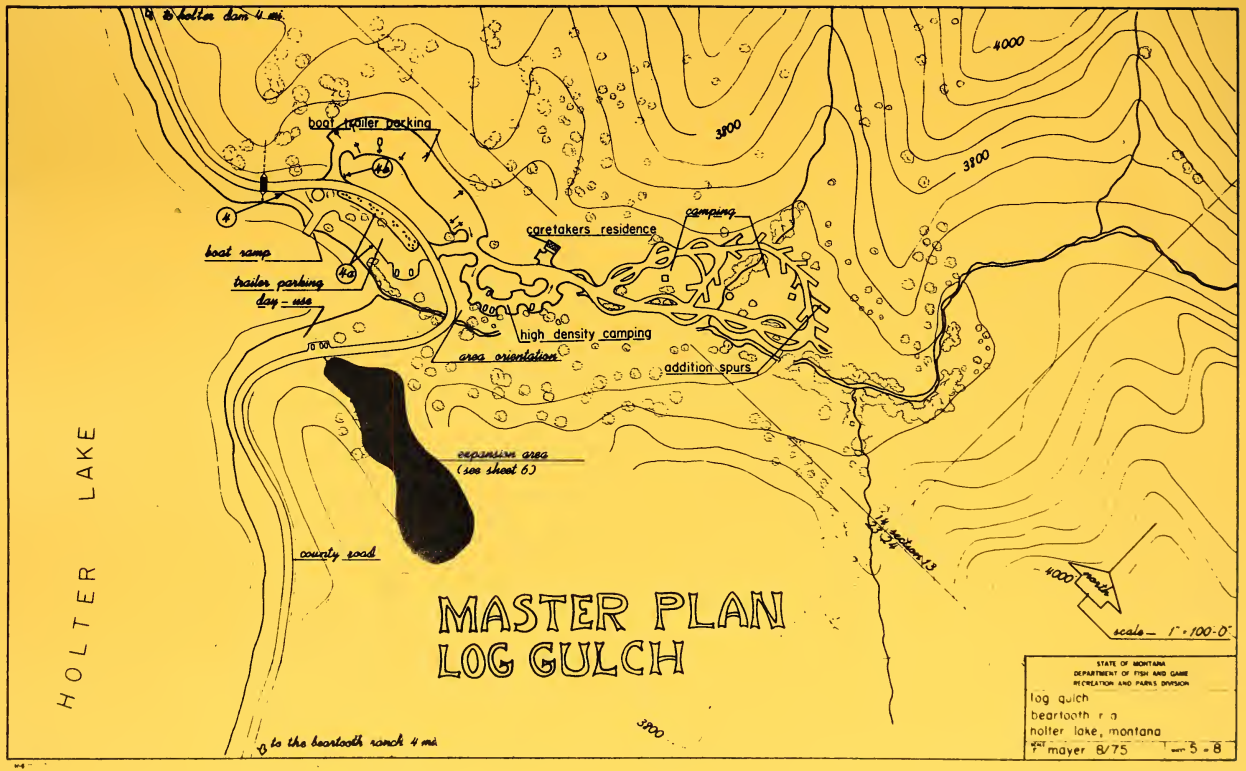


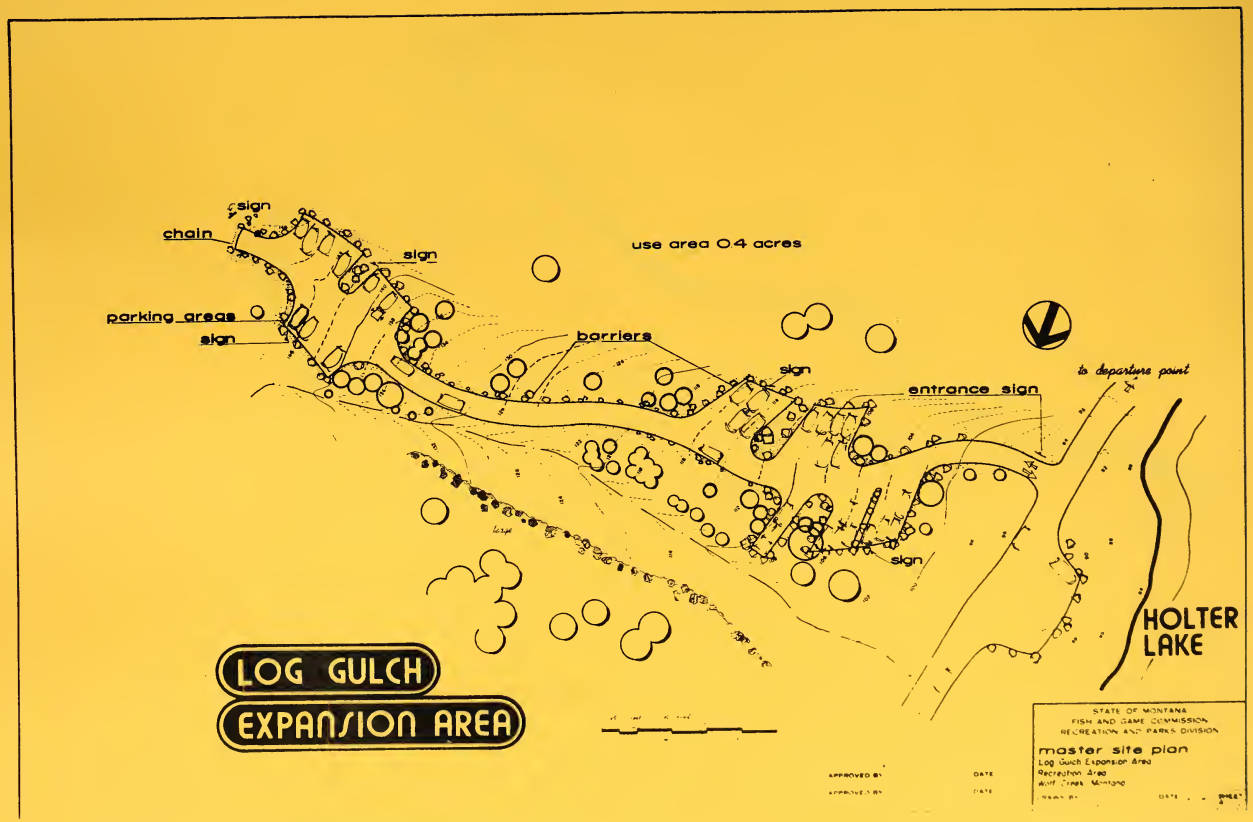
STATE OF MONTANA
FISH AND GAME COMMISSION
RECREATION AND PARKS DIVISION

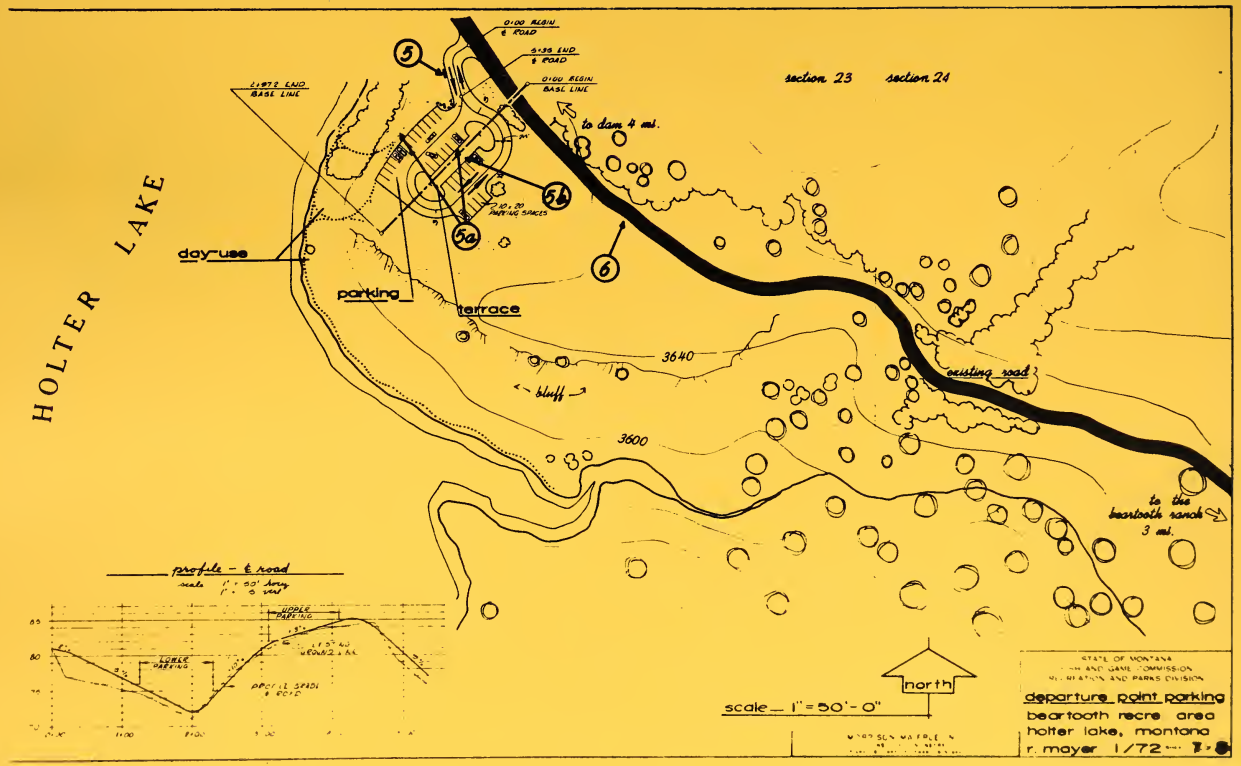
Preliminary
Juniper Bay Expansion Area
Beartooth Recreation Area
Wolf Creek, Mont

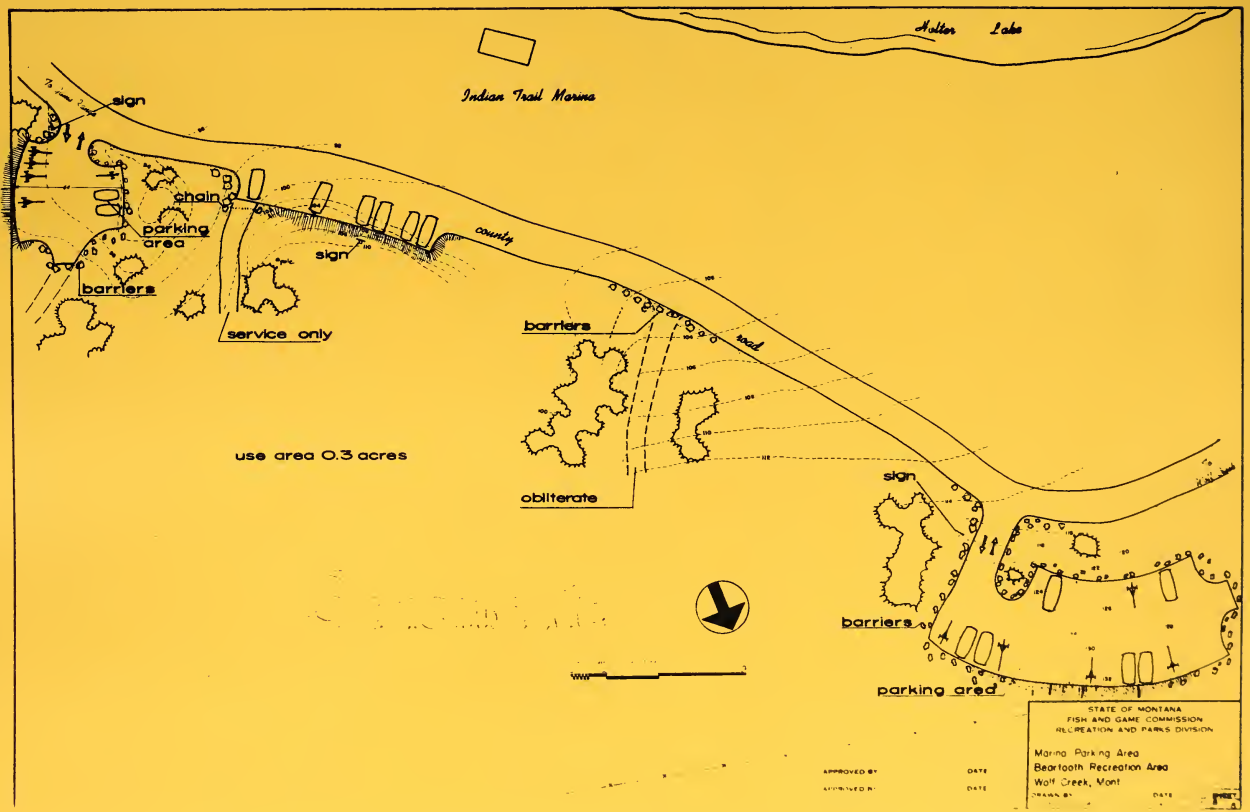
APPROVED BY DATE

APPROVED BY DATE


to holter dam 4 mi.
boat trailer parking
boat ramp
trailer parking day - use
caretakers residence
camping
high density camping
area orientation
addition spurs
expansion area (see sheet 6)
county road
HOLTER LAKE
to the beartooth ranch 4 mi
4000
3800
3800
4000
north
scale - 1" = 100-0"
MASTER PLAN
LOG GULCH
STATE OF MONTANA
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
RECREATION AND PARKS DIVISION
log gulch
beartooth r a
holter lake, montana
mayer 8/75
sht 5 - 8


sign
chain
sign
use area 0.4 acres
parking areas
sign
barriers
sign
entrance sign
to departure point
sign
HOLTER LAKE
LOG GULCH
EXPANSION AREA
STATE OF MONTANA
FISH AND GAME COMMISSION
RECREATION AND PARKS DIVISION
master site plan
Log Gulch Expansion Area
Recreation Area
APPROVED BY
DATE


HOLTER LAKE
day-use
parking
terrace
bluff
3640
3600
existing road
to dam 4 mi.
to the beartooth ranch 3 mi.
section 23
section 24
5
5a
5b
6
north
scale 1" = 50'-0"
profile - ℄ road
departure point parking
beartooth recr area
holter lake, montana
r. mayer 1/72


Holter Lake
Indian Trail Marina
sign
chain
parking area
barriers
sign
county
road
service only
barriers
use area 0.3 acres
obliterate
sign
barriers
parking area
STATE OF MONTANA
FISH AND GAME COMMISSION
RECREATION AND PARKS DIVISION
Marina Parking Area
Beartooth Recreation Area
Wolf Creek, Mont
APPROVED BY
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DATE

CONCLUSION

Some of the sharpest public policy issues in recent years on the Beartooth State Recreation Area have arisen as a result of conflicts between various recreation values and other uses of public lands, or between one and another type of recreation use. Most of these conflicts appear to fall in one of two categories: (1) conflict between the complete preservation of the area primarily for the purpose of maintaining the environmental status quo, and any type of use or development that disturbs or would change that environment, and (2) conflicts between recreation and other uses, or among different types of recreation.

Increasing rates of outdoor recreation activity in the Beartooth State Recreation Area, combined with population growth, may overwhelm this area in spite of new accomodations and regulations. Although the threat is not unique to this particular area, the seriousness of deterioration of the resource is merely a matter of degree.

Factors that should be considered in future recreation investments in this area should include: adequate funding for trained personnel (for regulating and controlling use of the resource), expected use rates, investment and administrative costs per unit of expected use, expected net impact on the regional economy, the opportunity cost of other uses of the land that will be foregone, impacts on the environment and comparisons with alternative developments.

In order to establish better communication on matters of policy affecting the Beartooth State Recreation Area it is recommended that a Citizen Advisory Board be implemented to advise on policy matters, on continuing programs, land use plans, as well as specific problems that arise from time to time. Such an Advisory Board can be used as a means of testing ideas before implementing them and as a means of communicating their ideas and proposals to the public.

It must be realized that resource capability for water oriented activities is extremely limited in this area, conflicting with public demands for such activities. These demands will perhaps have to be satisfied by the acquisition of additional areas on Holter Lake in areas with more suitable topography some distance from the Beartooth Game Management Area.

It is therefore recommended that an area survey be conducted to (1) determine the total quantity of land available for recreation in the Holter Lake region, and (2) assessments of design capacity of the resource be obtained for specific types of recreation. This will involve coordination with other state and federal agencies having administrative jurisdiction in this area.

SUMMARY

Serious though this situation is, it is over shadowed by a more pressing problem. The phenomenal growth of recreation in this area makes it increasingly urgent to define the place of the Beartooth in the total recreation picture. Until we have done these things it will not be possible to develop the acute sense of value necessary to weigh recreation in relation to other uses.

There has been some tendency to accept the current situation on the grounds that deteriorated campsites and recreation areas are the inevitable price

of outdoor recreation. However, such a resigned attitude doesn't appear either acceptable or necessary. Efforts to do a better job of developing and managing recreation sites in this area will be futile unless there is some control of use. Techniques must be developed to keep visitors loads within the capacity of established units and established units within the capacity of areas to provide enjoyment. Hopefully elements contained in this plan are a first step in this direction.

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